

2 May 1987

Senate Committee Approves Webster

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, May 1 — The Senate Intelligence Committee unanimously approved the nomination of William H. Webster as Director of Central Intelligence today despite questions about his knowledge of the Iran-contra affair.

The committee's unanimous recommendation virtually assures that Mr. Webster, the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, will be confirmed by the full Senate.

Senator David L. Boren of Oklahoma, the chairman of the intelligence committee, said after the 15-0 vote today that no date had been set for a vote by the entire Senate, but that he hoped one would be taken soon.

A The post of head of the Central Intelligence Agency has been vacant since January, when William J. Casey resigned after surgery to remove a cancerous brain tumor. President Reagan's first nominee to succeed Mr. Casey, Robert M. Gates, the agency's deputy director, withdrew after questions were raised about his involvement in the Iran-contra affair. He has continued to function as acting director.

Apparent Eagerness to Approve

A The members of the intelligence committee appeared eager to approve Mr. Webster, who has developed a reputation for professionalism and integrity in his nine years as head of the F.B.I. But questions about the role of Mr. Webster and the F.B.I. in the Iran-contra affair were repeatedly raised.

The committee delayed its vote this morning when a document was discovered about exchanges between the F.B.I. and Lieut. Col. Oliver L. North, the National Security Council aide who was dismissed when reports of the diversion of funds from the Iran arms sales to the Nicaraguan rebels were disclosed last November.

Senator William S. Cohen, Republican of Maine, the vice chairman of the committee, said the material was "a proposed communication from Colonel North to the F.B.I." that had not been sent. Senator Cohen declined to elaborate on the document, saying it concerned a classified matter.

Climate at F.B.I. Questioned

P After the vote, Senator Arlen Specter, Republican of Pennsylvania, read a statement that the confirmation hearings suggested that "the F.B.I. and to some extent Judge Webster himself did not respond to clear warnings to stop Colonel North's improper, if not illegal, activities."

"It may be that Colonel North's key position in the National Security Council, in conjunction with the President's strong personal support of the contras, created a climate where the F.B.I. winked at possible violations of law involving the contras," Senator Specter asserted.

Senator Specter then referred to incidents that came to light during the hearings that indicated that F.B.I. agents had learned of fund-raising activities by Colonel North on behalf of the contras and that Colonel North had tried several times to use his F.B.I. connections to delay criminal investigations.

Among the incidents was an F.B.I. report from July 1985 relating that Colonel North asserted that he had discussed a large private donation to the contras with President Reagan and Robert C. McFarlane, who was then the President's national security adviser. The money was to come from an Iranian posing as a Saudi prince. Later, the Iranian was convicted of bank fraud.

The notes made by the F.B.I. agent who interviewed Colonel North offer the first documented indication that

Colonel North talked directly with President Reagan about private donations for the contras at a time when Congress had banned all United States Government aid to them.

The F.B.I. report also suggests that Colonel North was aware of the restriction and tried to get around it. "Inasmuch as U.S. public law forbid expenditures of Government funds to aid Nicaraguan insurgents, it was inadvisable for a member of the N.S.C. to meet with the Prince directly," the report quoted Colonel North as saying.

For that reason, Colonel North was reported to have said, he had asked Richard R. Miller, the head of a Washington public relations firm and a former campaign worker for President Reagan, to meet with the man posing as a prince. Colonel North said Mr. Miller had been doing "contract work" for the National Security Council, helping raise funds for the contras.

Mr. Webster said he had never seen the report because the teletype containing it, which was sent from the

F.B.I.'s Washington field office to its headquarters two blocks away, was lost through a "technological error."

But the report indicates that the F.B.I. agent had asked for and received permission from a high-level bureau official to talk with Colonel North, a White House employee. Another F.B.I. report, dated September 1985, in which an F.B.I. agent said he had informed Colonel North that the presumed prince was an imposter, also indicates that high-level authority to speak with Colonel North had been sought.

Oliver B. Revell, the executive assistant director of the F.B.I. and the bureau official whom Colonel North is reported to have asked to help delay several Federal investigations, said today he assumed Colonel North had authority from his superiors in the White House.

"When you have a colonel on the N.S.C." dealing with issues like the hostages and the contras, Mr. Revell said to reporters, "I assumed that others much higher up were involved."